

Message Text

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22

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01

NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 /051 W

----- 009754

O R 050942Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2660

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, MY

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER NAMES NEW DEPUTY AND CABINET

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 1156 (DTG 030128Z MAR 76)

1. SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCED APPOINTMENT OF EDUCATION MINISTER DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMED AS NEW DEPTY PRIME MINISTER AND OTHER CHANGES IN CABINET POSITIONS AT PRESS BRIEFING 1500 HOURS MAR 5. CHOICE OF MAHATHIR CAME AS SOMETHING OF SURPRISE AS LOCAL RUMOR MILL OF LATE CENTERED ON HOME MINISTER GHAZALI SHAFIE OR AGRICULTURE MINISTER GHAFAR BABA AS MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES FOR JOB. GHAFAR HAS REFUSED SERVE IN NEW CABINET. MEANWHILE, HUSSEIN ONN APPARENTLY WILL PROCEED WITH HIS FIRST VISIT TO PERAK STATE MARCH 6-7. END SUMMARY.

2. IN SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE MOVE, PM HUSSEIN ONN NAMED
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AS THE NEW DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DR. MAHATHIR BIN

MOHAMED. THE PRESS FOR THE PAST FEW DAYS HAD BEEN FILLED WITH MORE OR LESS "AUTHORITATIVE" STORIES THAT THE NEW DPM WOULD BE AGRICULTURE MINISTER AND SENIOR UMNO VICE PRESIDENT GHAFAR BABA. ALTHOUGH MAHATHIR'S NAME HAD FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN EARLIER SPECULATION FOR DPM JOB (HE IS ONE OF THREE ELECTED UMNO VICE PRESIDENTS), ALL SIGNS RECENTLY HAD POINTED TO GHAFAR OR TO HOME MINISTER GHAZALI SHAFIE. GHAFAR HAS REPORTEDLY REFUSED TO SERVE AS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE IN THE NEW CABINET. MAHATHIR WILL RETAIN HIS EDUCATION PORTFOLIO AS DPM.

3. MOST TOP POSITIONS IN THE CABINET REMAINED UNCHANGED, WITH SEVERAL NEW PORTFOLIOS CREATED FOR THE FEW NEW FACES. MOST CHANGES INVOLVE PROMOTIONS AND SHIFTS OF DEPUTY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES. (COMMENT: CHOICE OF MAHATHIR, ONE OF THREE ELECTED UMNO VICE PRESIDENTS, INDICATES PM CHOSE NOT TO BUCK UMNO PARTY DISCIPLINE BY CHOOSING SOMEONE OUTSIDE TOP UMNO HIERARCHY. EMBASSY WILL PROVIDE FULL LIST OF CHANGES AND ADDITIONAL COMMENT WHEN FULL DETAILS ARE KNOWN).

4. PRIME MINISTER TO VISIT PERAK. PRESS CONTINUES TO REPORT DETAILS OF PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO IPOH AND ELSEWHERE IN STATE OF PERAK MAR 6 AND 7, AND SO WE ASSUME VISIT IS STILL ON. THE PRIME MINISTER IS SCHEDULED TO CALL ON THE SULTAN OF PERAK, RECEIVE VARIOUS BRIEFINGS BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND POLICE AND ARMED FORCES HEADS (PM'S BROTHER, BRIGADIER JAFAR ONN, IS THE REGIONAL ARMY COMMANDER THERE), AND MEET WITH UMNO PARTY OFFICERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER NATIONAL FRONT PARTIES. SOME SPECULATION HAS APPEARED IN PRESS THAT PM'S VISIT MAY LINKED TO MAJOR CHANGES IN STATE ADMINISTRATION (E.G., REPLACING THE REPORTEDLY CORRUPT AND INEFFECTUAL CHIEF MINISTER TAN SRI GHAZALI JAWI) AND REVAMP SECURITY OPERATIONS COMMAND STRUCTURE. TIGHT SECURITY PRECAUTIONS WILL BE IN EFFECT FOR VISIT, AS THIS HAS BEEN A MAJOR TERRORIST TROUBLESPOT (E.G., THE CHIEF POLICE OFFICER OF PERAK AND HIS DRIVER WAS ASSASSINATED IN BROAD DAYLIGHT IN IPOH ON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NOV 13, 1975).
UNDERHILL

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Message Attributes

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